

Mental Health and Wellbeing *during the* **Transition to Fatherhood**

Elevate Fatherhood

Presenter

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Workshop Objectives



- 1. Define mental health & wellness**
- 2. Review of 22 studies on new fathers**
- 3. Recommendations for practice**

Mental Health (WHO)

A state of wellbeing in which the individual...

- Realizes his or her own abilities
- Can cope with the normal stresses of life
- Can work productively and fruitfully, and
- Is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

Poor mental health of fathers impacts negatively on children, partners and society.

- 10.4% of fathers experience depression between the 1st trimester of pregnancy and the 1st year postpartum.
- Pregnancy is the most demanding period for the fathers' reorganization of self.
- Labor and birth are the most emotional moments involving highly mixed feelings, ranging from helplessness and anxiety to pleasure and pride.
- Main stress factors during perinatal period include negative feeling about the pregnancy; role restrictions related to becoming a father, fear of childbirth and feelings of incompetence about infant care.

Mental health and wellbeing during the transition to fatherhood: a systematic review of first time fathers' experiences

Seven Synthesized Findings

1. New fatherhood identity
2. Competing challenges of new fathers
3. Negative feelings and fears
4. Stress and coping
5. Lack of support
6. What new fathers want
7. Positive aspects of fatherhood

Research Authors

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1 New Fatherhood Identity

- They felt like they were fulfilling their role as “men”.
- They recognized that new role came with changed priorities and responsibilities which they welcomed.
- They worried about being a “good father” and “getting it right”.

2 Competing Challenges of New Fatherhood

- They experience a number of competing demands.
- They had to balance work demands with time they with their child.
- They experienced a deterioration in their relationship with their partner, including reduced satisfaction with their sexual relationship.
- Expectations of new fathers often did not meet reality, especially around breast feeding and bonding.

3 Negative Feelings and Fears

- Expectant and new fathers experienced a range of fears and often did not know what to expect.
- Fathers felt helpless, pushed out of the relationship and left them struggling to find a role.
- Men experienced specific fears relating to their partner's labor and birthing process and worried about the wellbeing for their partner and the baby.

4 Stress and Coping

- New fathers' role restrictions and changes in lifestyle resulted in increased stress levels which manifested as tiredness, irritability and frustration.
- Fathers used denial or escape activities, such as smoking, working longer hours, or listening to music, as coping techniques.

5 Lack of Support

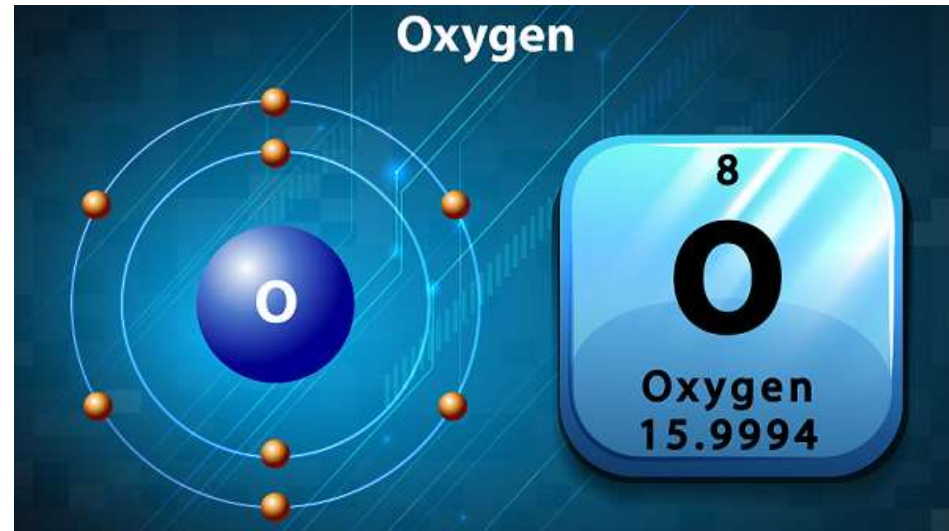
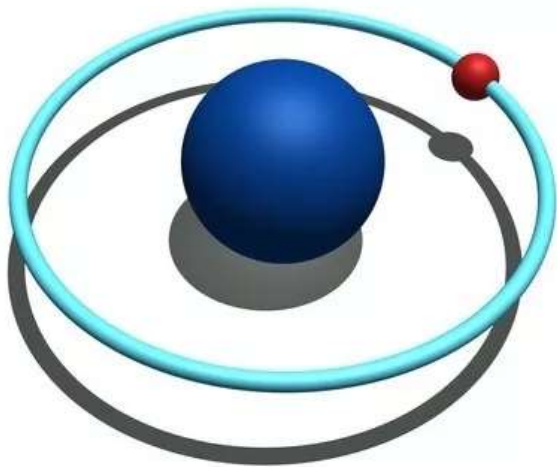
- New fathers lacked support from their male work colleagues and peers.
- The main barrier limiting support is the lack of resources aimed specifically at men.
- Men were often not viewed or treated as equal partners and lacked acknowledgement or involvement by health professionals during their transition to fatherhood.

6 What New Fathers Want

- More guidance and support around the preparation for fatherhood and relationship changes with their partner
- To have a variety of support mechanisms in place to include parenting groups involving others with similar experience, father-friendly resources and father-inclusive services

7 Positive Aspects of Fatherhood

- Fathers who were involved with their child and bonded with them over time found the experience to be rewarding.
- Those who recognized the need for change adjusted better to the new role, especially when they worked together with their partner.



Five Recommendations for Practice



Recommendation for Practice

Health professionals should routinely inform and educate expectant fathers about the changes and challenges they may experience during their transition to fatherhood and offer information on where they could access appropriate resources and support.

Recommendations for Practice

- Father should be encouraged to attend antenatal appointments and informed about the importance of attachment and how they can bond with their new born babies, holding them as often as possible and engaging in verbal exchanges when changing and feeding them.
- Informing fathers about the importance of their involvement in the child's development and how rewarding this could be to them, could encourage new fathers to develop new skills and self-confidence in their parenting – and reduce the chance of disappointment in the postnatal period.

Recommendation for Practice

Health professionals should focus on couple relationships, including changes in sexual relations, and discuss the importance of this with both parents in the antenatal and postnatal period. This could help couples manage their expectations of parenthood and encourage them to use more positive forms of problem-solving to avoid relationship deterioration during the perinatal period.

Recommendation for Practice

Health services need to adopt a father-inclusive model for supporting new parents so that fathers feel acknowledged and adequately supported. There is a need for more father-inclusive resources tailored to address their needs and resonate with their experiences.

Recommendation for Practice

The fathers having least flexibility and autonomy in their work report experiencing more unhappiness, anxiety and generally higher level of stress. These finding suggest increasing workplace flexibility and provisions such as parental leave are important for men's postnatal mental health.

Your  Thoughts

